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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: OMANI VIEW OF SYRIA AND IRAN, MAJLIS  
ASH-SHOURA ELECTIONS, OMANI MEDIA CONSTRAINTS

SUMMARY: Government-owned "Oman" talks of "new horizons of cooperation" with Syria and "firmly rooted" relations with Iran, and tells Omani citizens that voting is a "shared responsibility"; columnist in privately owned "Al-Watan" criticizes government "obstacles" to the proper functioning of Omani media. "Al-Watan's" editor-in-chief is critical of U.S. Iraq policy. Coverage of Adhamiya wall in Baghdad, Tobias resignation. END SUMMARY.

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COVERAGE

12. There was intense coverage of the Adhamiya wall in Baghdad in Omani dailies this week. Political cartoons were skeptical of the new U.S. security plan in Baghdad. On April 27, the back page of privately owned "Al-Watan" (circulation 42,000) ran a full-page, color spread showing an Iraqi man pushed to the ground by two American soldiers, one of whom is pointing a gun at him. Below the photo was a poem by the paper's editor-in-chief, Abd al-Hamid al Ta'ie, called "Akh," (which the piece explains is a cry of pain). Papers this week also carried reports of U.S. Ambassador Randall Tobias's resignation.

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OMAN'S RELATIONS WITH IRAN, SYRIA

13. On April 30, state-owned daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) published an editorial indicating Oman's attitude toward Syria and Iran under the headline, "Strong Relations for the Benefit of the Whole Region." The editorial coincides with recent meetings of officials from each country, which were convened in Muscat.

"Yesterday the meetings of the Omani-Syrian joint commission ended, and they included negotiations and agreements that opened up new horizons of cooperation between the Sultanate and the brotherly Syrian Arab Republic... Omani-Iranian relations are firmly-rooted, continuously exhibiting wise and far-sighted co-operation, capable of protecting mutual interests in all circumstances...in spite of the numerous threats and dangers that the region has faced... Given the shared interests between the two countries, and the trust, frankness, and clarity involved in their relations, and given the true, shared desire in using every means possible in order to ensure that the region and its people avoid any dangers or unstable situations...the Omani-Iranian joint commission represents an important aspect of the movement that the region is witnessing, in which the Sultanate plays an important role. At a time when the

Sultanate and the Islamic Republic of Iran have taken numerous steps spanning the past three and a half decades...in the fields of economics, trade, oil, transportation, investment, and other things, all of which benefit their peoples, the meetings of the Omani-Iranian joint commission are yet another addition to these areas of cooperation."

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ELECTIONS A "SHARED RESPONSIBILITY"  
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¶4. On April 25, "Oman" ran an editorial entitled, "Indications of the Number of Candidates in Majlis Ash-Shoura Elections":

"Citizens who are able to vote will elect 84 members to the Majlis Ash-Shoura to its sixth session. That means that around ten candidates will be competing for each seat in the Majlis Ash-Shoura...competition will be stiff. Laws organize elections, and the specific steps and tools involved, but the conscience of the Omani citizen and his care for his own interests and that of his children in their present and future constitute another obligation to participate in the shared responsibility of elections."

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"SLAMMED" DOORS HINDER OMANI MEDIA  
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¶5. On April 25, "Al-Watan's" columnist Ali Rashid al Matani wrote a piece entitled, "Media is the Mirror of the Society":

"Media is the mirror of any society and is playing an important role when there is beneficial attention to the cases and problems that it brings to light. However, it is also true that media will not develop when obstacles are set before it, and when it lacks the opportunity to carry out its role. [In Oman], there are a lot of

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sensitivities and rejection of what the media deals with. The media is suffering from [official] secrecy and lack of data, and when it tries to attend meetings that deal with the public interest, doors are slammed in its face...which hinders its ability to fulfill its societal role. The question presents itself: How can the media practice its role in an improper and unhealthy environment."

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"OBSTACLES" FOR OMANI JOURNALISTS  
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¶6. On April 29 in "Al-Watan," al Matani highlighted the improper practices of some government officials in dealing with press and media personnel in official events such as visits of foreign presidents to Oman in a piece called "Scaring the Media":

"When our country hosts a high-level official visitor, our media is marginalized to the extent it broadcasts and copies official statements from other foreign television channels that escort their official representatives. At the same time, our media people face all kind of obstacles even if it is just a matter of taking some camera shots. The journalists are challenged with the protocol considerations and other [Omani government[] agencies to such an extent that they don't get the chance to meet or take any statements from the guests, or practice their job like other other journalists do. This has made Omani journalists give up covering any event or high-level official visits to Oman. These types of practices are not part of government's standing policy towards the local media institutions and journalists; rather this is malpractice by some government agencies which exaggerate their protocol without no care for the negative effects on journalists. These are some of the aspects that hinder the development of our media."

GRAPPO